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SUBJECT: BENIN: CHINESE FINANCE CONSTRUCTION OF PILOT AGRICULTURAL CENTER

REF: 06 COTONOU 918

¶1. On March 31, President Yayi attended a groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of a Chinese-funded Pilot Agricultural Center in Seme Kpodji, a village located 12 miles from Cotonou, in the department of Oueme. The construction of the center will be entirely financed by the Chinese government, for a total amount of 3 Billion CFA (6 Million USD). The Agricultural Center will cover an area of 56 hectares and will comprise an administrative unit with accommodations and training facilities and a large zone for research, seed multiplication and agricultural technology demonstration.

¶2. The Pilot Agricultural Center will focus on research to improve corn varieties in order to increase the production of corn in Benin. It will also provide agricultural training for farmers and poultry farming training for poultry farmers and technicians. In addition, the Center is expected to bolster agricultural experimentation in Benin.

¶3. During the groundbreaking ceremony, the Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fishing, Roger Dovonou said that the Agricultural Center project resulted from the visit that President Yayi made to China in 2006 (Reftel) and the Second China-Africa Summit during which a number of actions were taken in order to support African countries development. The Chinese Ambassador to Benin, Gen Wenbing said that Benin had benefitted from the project, the first of its kind in Africa, because of the friendship between the two countries. Wenbing stated that through that Center China and Benin would give each other a helping hand to face global food crises.

¶4. The construction of the Pilot Agricultural Center will take nine months and the Center will become operational by the first quarter of 2010.

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